

1935

Report of the Home Economics Department

Lois D. Cobb

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Report of Home Economics Department
Institute of American Fats and Oils
August 1934 - May 1935

By

Lois Dowdle Cobb, Director

In submitting a report I recognize the fact that it is not possible to give a complete account of the work done in any department in a period of ten months. It is my purpose however, to point out the chief activities engaged in, some of the objectives aimed at and results accomplished and then to turn from this backward look to the future to determine what the opportunities are and thus to map out plans to take advantage of those opportunities.

Accordingly this report of the Home Economics Department of the Institute of American Fats and Oils will deal briefly with the work done in cooperation with educational institutions, with the various organizations contacted, educational exhibits installed and work done in connection therewith, educational material prepared and disseminated, conferences held with those in position to aid in the conduct of our program, new contacts made, my own part in the legislative program of the Institute, and the travel incident to all these activities.

It is well known by all who have studied the situation that the dairy people have a well organized educational program that has during the past few years reached practically every hamlet in the United States. Because of the unusual value of milk as a food and its importance in the dietaries of children, home economists generally have aligned themselves with the dairy program to the end that they are in the majority of cases more or less bitterly prejudiced against margarine. Notwithstanding the fact that this prejudice is the result of misinformation, it has been reflected in a similar prejudice on the part of consumers and therefore has had a definite influence on the sale of margarine. All of this had been brought very forcibly to my attention because of my own attitude prior to my connection with this organization and also as a result of the attitude of some of my friends toward my new connection.

I determined therefore early in the year to seek every possible opportunity to talk with home economists and acquaint them with the truth about margarine. I selected a few leaders among whom to work first. I wrote Dr. Margaret Edwards, Dean of Home Economics of the Woman's College of the University of North Carolina, and succeeded in interesting her to the point of getting her to spend the major portion of a day with me going over the entire field. As a result she agreed to have certain of her food classes work with margarine. Since Dr. Edwards is Vice-President of the American Home Economics Association it was much easier to get entree to some of the other institutions I wanted to reach after securing her cooperation.

I then wrote to heads of Home Economics Departments in institutions in Georgia, Texas, Tennessee, Kansas, Montana and Iowa, requesting that they conduct the same type of work. Women from two states never answered my letters. The woman in Montana wrote back to say that they were interested in "fostering their infant dairy industry".

After several months of work on this problem the Livestock Association of that state was able to get the president of that institution to say that their Home Economist was in error and that his institution recognizes the overshadowing importance of the beef cattle industry in Montana. Of course it was useless at that time to pursue the matter any further with the hope of getting real support from the Home Economics Department of Montana State College but at least I was able to tell our story and succeeded in getting something done to restrain false teaching in regard to margarine.

In Texas I succeeded in getting some very good work started and I am hoping that we shall be able to get a report on it before very long. The work there is carried on by a graduate student and I hope that when her thesis is written we will be able to have copies of it. In Kansas I got no response at all and supposed I had merely wasted my effort. However this last week I had a letter from another member of the department in the Kansas institution saying that since I had offered them cooperation last fall they would now like to take advantage of the offer and asked that we send them margarine for test work in comparison with butter and other shortenings. This work will of necessity be brief since the school year is so nearly completed but we will get some results and it gives me assurance that I can approach them another year and find increasing interest.

I made one or two field trips to get this educational work started, visiting Texas, Tennessee, Missouri, Oklahoma, Mississippi, Iowa, Oregon, California and New Mexico. At Peabody College in Nashville I was invited to speak to the students in a foods class. I had an interesting conference with the head of the Home Economics Department who has used margarine for many years and thinks it ought to be available everywhere. When I offered to send her some she suggested that she serve it at a banquet to be given to the faculty and their friends, the socially elite of Nashville. Naturally I was delighted to have such an opportunity. While some experimental work in cookery has been done using margarine, it is only a beginning. I think however, that next year we can hope to get some good results there.

In Missouri I found another Vice-President of the American Home Economics Association as head of the Home Economics Department of the University. Previous correspondence had developed that she is strongly opposed to discriminatory food legislation and interested in seeing such legislation repealed. After my visit with her I sent her some margarine to use with her students but some of that which was sent evidently was not fresh. However, we found her quite willing to continue her efforts to remove restrictive legislation against a wholesome food product. She has proposed some discussion of this topic on the general program for the meeting of the American Home Economics Association to be held in Chicago late in June.

For various reasons I did not succeed in getting any experimental work done in Oklahoma, Mississippi, Iowa, Oregon or California. In Mississippi for example, there is no opportunity for graduate work. In California it did not seem advisable to ask for such work to be carried on this year but the conferences I had with the Home Economists in the State institutions visited will help to give margarine a place in the dietaries of the people on relief and of those with low food budgets.

The situation was very different in Oregon and in Iowa. I found in Oregon that the people in the State institutions had rather been intimidated by the dairy interests which had threatened their state appropriations. The people who had the responsibility for planning meals in the dormitories had used large quantities of margarine in the past and would gladly do so again if they dared.

In Iowa I had conferences with three of the Deans, with the Director of the Dairy Division and with all the foods people but was unable to secure cooperation in carrying on experimental work due to the extreme prejudice in favor of dairy products. One of the men even went so far as to say that the cotton farmer has no right to sell cotton oil as it is a by-product of the cotton crop. His is an extreme view but it shows how much prejudice actually exists and to what extent we meet resistance. I am convinced that if we can secure the cooperation of the corn-hog farmers of that state we can expect a different attitude on the part of college officials.

In New Mexico I found the woman in charge of the Home Economics Department quite eager to hear the truth and glad to have the opportunity to test our product. In that state as in several others visited the drouth had been severe enough to curtail feed supplies and make it impossible for the people of that state to produce enough feed for their cattle. Many people were on relief and Home Economists were glad to be able to recommend margarine for relief diets in order to make the emergency relief funds go as far as possible in feeding the needy.

I also went to Chicago University several times during this past year for conferences with different members of the staff. As a result of a visit with the head of the Foods Department I was invited to speak to one of the foods classes. Miss Easton of John F. Jelke Company went with me and carried samples of a number of different types of margarine. Students and teachers were glad to taste the products and asked for the privilege of visiting the plant and seeing how margarine is made.

One of the things I have tried to do this year is to maintain the friendly relationship I have always enjoyed with the extension forces in the field. Due to their prejudice against margarine, that has not been easy. Except for the fact that I was for many years an extension worker myself and know the policies of the organizations in the various states and have many close personal friends among the supervisory forces, I am sure I would not have been able to get any help from them. As it was I received invitations to speak to the extension workers in a number of states. I attended the annual conferences of extension workers and spoke to all the home demonstration agents in the states of Oklahoma, Mississippi and Arizona. In addition I had conferences with smaller groups of extension workers in California, Nevada, New Mexico, Tennessee, Georgia, Texas and Louisiana. These contacts have proved very valuable especially in Oklahoma. My talk to these agents was mimeographed and handed out to them so there could be no doubt as to my viewpoint with regard to their responsibility in connection with the producers of fats and oils and the consumers on relief or on very low income. This manuscript has been distributed rather widely among educational people because it tells our story in a rather comprehensive way and keeps the record clear as to our cooperation with the extension organization.

In the other states visited I always conferred with the extension people as well as the home economists doing teaching or research at the institutions. In Oklahoma I even talked with the head of the Dairy Division of the College. I had a fine opportunity to disarm him because the Dean of the College who proposed the conference, went with me, introduced me as his friend and rather took my side in the discussions. Before I left he told me he had not assisted in the passage of the anti-margarine legislation and would not oppose our proposed change in the law.

I attended the annual meeting of the American Farm Bureau Federation held in Nashville. This gave me a very fine opportunity to contact farm leaders from every section of the country. At that meeting a separate national organization of farm women was set up as an affiliate of the Farm Bureau Federation. Some of the officers of this new organization I had known before; others I met for the first time.

I also spent a day enroute to Mississippi from Nashville with the manager of the Mississippi Farm Bureau Federation and discussed our program in full with him. He was not in sympathy with our objectives nor did I change his views. However, we had believed we would have his support in our effort to get the domestic fats bill passed in Mississippi. So at least we know his position and know we cannot depend on him for help. He is a long time personal friend of Mr. Cobb's as well as a friend of mine and therefore I am sure I did not injure our cause in any way.

As I have traveled from state to state I have taken advantage of every opportunity to talk to the vocational people also. I have conferred with the supervisors of vocational agriculture and home economics to keep them informed as to our program and to put into their hands all the information which we have. In many cases the home economics teachers work very closely with the emergency relief organizations especially in planning dietaries. I have also contacted the nutrition advisors and those in charge of work relief for the emergency relief administration in the various states. In some cases I have been able to have margarine added to the grocery lists and in other states I have been asked to send samples of margarine in order that those in charge might know something of the quality of the product. The influence of the people directing these programs is bound to be of value whenever a change in margarine legislation is proposed.

In January I attended the annual meeting of the American National Livestock Association and had opportunity to address the Convention. This assured me a friendly reception from those in attendance at the convention and made it easy for me to discuss our program. The contacts made there have been of help in a number of states visited since that time.

As I was a member for many years of the State Federation of Women's Clubs in my own home state, I have had access to meetings of the clubs wherever I have gone. I am also a member of the Zonta Club here in Washington and as a result have been accepted without question by the business and professional Women in other cities especially where Zonta clubs are located. Membership in the National Woman's Democratic Club, in the American Home Economics Association, the Home Economics Women in Business, the Association of Southern Agricultural

Workers and the American Association of University Women has been of value also in giving me entree to the groups I wanted to contact.

Some of the most interesting conferences I have had, have been those with newspaper women. The Progressive Farmer and Southern Ruralist, for example, for a long number of years maintained a very hostile attitude toward margarine. It is the largest sectional farm paper in the country and the most influential - having almost a million circulation. I have had the pleasure of seeing them change their attitude to the point where they now advocate margarine in relief diets, actually include it in recipes, and talk of the value of the industry as an outlet for cotton oil and beef fat. The present Secretary of the Farm Bureau in Kentucky was editor of the Kentucky - Tennessee edition of the paper at the same time that I was editor of the Home Department and was actually belligerent when margarine was discussed. He has now agreed to help us through his organization, change the margarine law in Kentucky to tax only the product made of foreign oil.

I have had personal conferences with the Home Department editors of McCall's Magazine and Woman's Home Companion, with Dr. Eddy of Good Housekeeping, with the editor of Practical Home Economics, the editor of Sunset Magazine, and with home economics editors of many newspapers. I have also visited personally many directors of home service departments of public utilities. These women all hold cooking schools and most of them have experimental kitchens. In many cases I have sent samples of margarine for experimental work and have succeeded in getting a definite response from a number of them so that now they use margarine interchangeably with butter in their food columns. Only this week I had lunch with the editor of Practical Home Economics who has agreed to publish an article on the new margarine industry in the October number of the Journal. She has been using margarine in recipes for almost a year. This is a magazine which goes to home economics workers in the field and is used for reference work by home economics students everywhere.

Last fall we had a display booth in connection with the meeting of the American Dietetic Association. At this meeting we served sandwiches of bread and margarine and talked to visitors about the improved texture and flavor of the product made of domestic fats and oils. There were almost a thousand dietitians in attendance, most of whom stopped to chat with us and taste our product. These people know more about food than any other group in the country. We secured the names of all who registered at the convention and sent them our bulletin on The Wholesomeness and Food Value of Margarine. We have circularized them several times since the convention, sending them literature that will be helpful to them in their work.

In May we had a similar exhibit at Memphis at the National Cotton Show. We served hot biscuits made with margarine and spread with margarine. We distributed also our new bulletin "Margarine on Hot Biscuits". At this exhibit we had posters which gave the economic facts in connection with the manufacture of margarine from domestic fats and oils and appealed to the sense of fair play of those who visited the exhibit to help get the Tennessee oleomargarine law amended so as to tax only that product made of foreign oil. We had a registration book which we used as a petition for signatures of those

who were interested in having the law so amended.

We are having similar exhibits in connection with the meeting of the American Medical Association in Atlantic City, June 10 - 14, and in connection with the meeting of the American Home Economics Association in Chicago, the latter part of June. For these exhibits we have had charts made giving the facts with regard to the nutritive value of margarine. Some of the officials of the American Home Economics Association have looked critically at every statement made regarding the food value of margarine, thus displaying their prejudice against it. Some of them even went so far as to question the work of Dr. Carlson of Chicago University, in connection with this experimental feeding of animal fat margarine in some Vitamin A studies made by him. I finally went to see Dr. Carlson and talked the matter over with him, and he gave me a letter which I think effectively answers their arguments. At any rate, I have been permitted to go forward with my exhibit at the annual meeting of the Association.

I have written two bulletins this year, "The Wholesomeness and Food Value of Margarine" and "Margarine on Hot Biscuits". These have required a rather exhaustive study of the current publications dealing with nutrition and chemistry of foods, in order to be sure that I was making only such statements as could be substantiated by current literature. In order to have an exhibit at the American Medical Association it was necessary to submit all of the literature which would be handed out at the convention for the approval of the Committee on Foods of the Association. Naturally I was very gratified that both of these bulletins were approved.

I have this past week worked out a mimeographed circular which I am hoping to be able to distribute at the American Medical Association meeting, and which I will submit to the Association as soon as it has been run. I made a very careful study of the facts involved in this circular and feel sure that it will meet with their approval.

As compared with other members of the Institute, my definite activity in the legislative field has been a rather minor part of the year's program, and yet I feel that the department has made a very substantial contribution in this line. We have kept in mind always the necessity of removal of restrictive legislation wherever possible, and particularly the desire of the Institute to transfer the industry to a domestic basis. As I have gone about the country on other missions, I have made a point of contacting groups of producers and the educational forces working with farm groups, and have told the story to them. I have traveled in seventeen states and in every single state visited I have, without exception, I think, found opportunity to do something that would help definitely with the legislative problem.

I feel that the exhibit at Memphis at the National Cotton Show is certain to be of help in any future work that may be done there. I am sure that my visit to Iowa will have its influence in securing the support of college people, at least in preventing adverse legislation. I had some very helpful conferences in California which I am sure had an influence on the situation there. I think I can safely say that I did much through close personal friendship to line up the

Pacific Rural Press. My trip to Nevada did not bring the results we had hoped to get with the Nevada State Farm Bureau, but I had the satisfaction of knowing that at least a good many of the farmers who were present changed their views as individual dairymen with regard to the whole margarine question. Moreover we can be sure of the support of the Food and Drug officials of that State and can be equally sure that the Home Demonstration forces are definitely committed to the support of the dairy industry to the extent that they will probably fight us. Sometimes it is just as helpful to know our weaknesses as to know our strength.

In Oklahoma I worked in twenty-one cities and towns, getting support for our proposed amendment to the oleomargarine law. Before I started to work in that state I made a very careful plan and then went directly to the College of Agriculture, where I conferred with all the officials at the College, in order that they might know what my objectives were and just how I intended to work. This enabled me to have the support of many of the extension people located in different sections of the State. Of course I contacted all of the producer organizations and all of the crushers and processors of cotton oil, but I also made a particular point of getting our story over to the leaders of the women's civic organizations. I even had opportunity to present our program briefly to the State D.A.R. Convention and to several forums organized by the civic and political clubs among women. I feel that a very fine foundation has been laid for follow-up work in Oklahoma and that we will have a really good chance to pass our bill there when it may finally be brought up for consideration.

When I started to work with the Institute I very carefully studied the situation from the standpoint of the woman in business and the woman professional worker, as well as from the standpoint of the housekeeper. I was convinced then, and I am even more convinced now, that the dairy people have done a very thorough job of misinforming the public. They have taken advantage of the fact that milk is a necessary food. They have gone into the schools and colleges and taught the need for milk, and incidentally for butter. Their educational program is recognized as one of the best in the whole country and one that covers practically every county in the United States. Most of the teachers of food and nutrition have been unduly influenced in their work in favor of the dairy program, and as a result the prejudice against margarine has grown to the point where it has become an outlawed food in the minds of most home economics people. Consumers generally have a conviction that margarine is an inferior food product. Our job is one of education also.

I am convinced that as long as people must economize in the buying of food there will always be a real need for margarine, one which cannot be met by any other food product. As the situation stands now, with half of our population unable to buy butter, both because of the price and because it is not produced, there is in my opinion opportunity for growth and development of the margarine industry beyond anything it has ever experienced. I think that while it is the part of wisdom to say little about the ultimate development of the margarine industry, the manufacturers themselves need to recognize the opportunity there is for very definite growth in the near future. Our most important task is to break down the prejudice against margarine which

to my mind is the biggest obstacle in the way of the development of the industry, because, after all, there is no doubt that the anti-margarine legislation which exists, is the result of prejudice based upon misinformation which has been widely disseminated through a long period of years. The problem as I see it involves not merely removal of restrictive legislation, but the education of the public to understand that this is a vital social problem. The interests of the producers of fats and oils and the consumers who make up the 50% of our population which is denied the chance to use butter, must be brought more prominently into the picture.

The Home Economics Department of the Institute can help in a very definite way to take advantage of the opportunities that exist. Work should be carried forward in the educational institutions which have been contacted this past year, and other state institutions should be added. Wherever possible we should have experimental cookery going on, using margarine as an alternate for butter. Every time we demonstrate to a home economics teacher or class that margarine gives equally as good results as butter and at a much lower price we make friends for margarine who will help us secure favorable legislation. Plans need to be made this summer so as to get such work under way early in the fall in order to give the maximum of time for fitting a program of this type into the school year. With the beginning that has been made in this field, it ought to be possible to have two or three institutions assign work of this type to graduate students. If they choose favorable topics some of the theses written will verify our claims for margarine and thus put the responsibility for those claims upon the educational institutions in which the work is done. That will place us in a strategic position. It is of interest to note also that such work as has been started has cost us nothing aside from a little travel and the sending of batches of margarine from time to time.

I think the Institute will be in a much stronger position and have a very much more definite claim for the support of educational institutions, if the field is broadened to include some other fats and oils products as well as margarine. I have tried wherever possible to show the interest of our organization in other products, but it seems to be our policy to talk about margarine so much that other fatty foods are lost sight of.

I hope this year to make such contacts as will enable me to receive a goodly number of invitations from colleges and universities to speak to students on The Place of Fat in the Diet. With that idea in mind I should like to get out a circular this winter on that general subject. I believe it would find ready acceptance on the part of Home Economists, particularly if we can add a rather comprehensive bibliography. I am sure it will give us the prestige that is needed to win our way into other organized educational groups. Progress in that field will inevitably lead into increased opportunity for contacting federated club women, parent-teacher organizations and other civic organizations among women.

I would like to continue the placing of exhibits with various organizations whose support we need. If we could work out two or three posters that can be offered to teachers I think they would be of material help in educating people to an acceptance of our product.

This could be done not only in the food field but in the field of economics, and eventually we could hope to get out a poster which would deal with the legislative problem, making our appeal in the field of sociology.

I am hoping this fall that we can also work out a clip sheet service which will go to newspapers, especially to those metropolitan dailies which have Home Economics editors. Perhaps the surest way to get results would be to line up with some syndicated service, furnishing articles on the food value of margarine and recipes for its use. Whatever can be done to maintain friendly relationships with the organizations in the field, especially the extension service and home economics people in general, is of the greatest importance. Such work frequently requires time which is hard to account for, but which may result in the most valuable service to the Institute. I have found that the prejudice against margarine is so great that I had to re-establish myself professionally with many groups of home economics people. Of course that is unreasonable and unjust, but that does not alter the facts.

After all, the vital concern of the industry is to have its product consumed. As long as there is an unholy prejudice against margarine we will find adverse legislation. Not until the consuming public is convinced that margarine is a wholesome food which meets all the nutritive requirements of the family will we have any demand on the part of housewives for free and unrestricted sale of the product. And not until the producers of fats and oils are convinced that margarine offers increased outlets for their product and therefore can bring them more money in return for their labor, can we hope to get the undivided support of producers. The greatest strength the Institute has is found in its producer interests. They should be brought to the front and emphasized in every possible way. Since producers are interested in fats and oils and not in any one product made from them, the Home Economics Department should in my judgment spend some time next year working with all the products made from fats and oils, instead of devoting the entire time to margarine.